

"HILL CORNER"

At the junction of County Line Road and
Matson Ford Road, N.W. Corner
Radnor Township
Delaware County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA- 1001

HABS

PA

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
120 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

"BEL ORME"

Street Address: At the junction of County Line Road
and Matson Ford Road, N. W. Corner
Radnor Township, Delaware County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner: Lester H. Sellers, above address

Present Occupant: Owner

Present Use: Residence

Brief Statement
of Significance: This small original fieldstone farmhouse has been
much altered in the best possible taste by George
B. Shaw (probably) and Wilson Eyre, using tradi-
tional materials.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Probably Nathan Brooke between 1806-1815; his widow, Mary Brooke; by 1848, their sons, Mark Brooke and Benjamin Brooke, and until 1880's; then Walter L. C. Biddle; from 1889 until recent years, Thomas Mott and heirs; 1938 acquired by present owner. (For references and further details see section B of this Part.)
2. Date of erection: Original section erected in very early 1800's
3. Architect, builder, suppliers etc.: No information on original architect. 1917 alterations by Wilson Eyre. 1938 alterations by Lester H. Sellers.
4. Original plans, construction etc.: No information
5. Notes on alterations and additions: About 1900 Thomas Mott caused superficial alterations to be made in English style, using half-timbered and stucco finish, probably by his son-in-law, Boston architect George B. Shaw. In 1917 Philadelphia architect Wilson Eyre restored the fieldstone character and made the two original rooms on the south wall into one large parlor, added a small wing on the west and a larger wing on the northeast. In 1938 Philadelphia architect-owner Lester H. Sellers lowered the floor in large parlor to south, installed new doorways and made other minor changes throughout the house.

The Cow Barn was built in 1900 by Thomas Mott, who had a tenant farmer in the house.

6. Important old views and references: The late Wilson Eyre owned photographs before and after the 1917 alterations, but their whereabouts since his death are not known. The Mott heirs have no pictures of Bel Orme.

An architectural survey of the house and grounds, with charming drawings, prepared in 1947 by architect-owner Lester H. Sellers, is in his possession.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Tradition says that the house was built by and for a member of the family of Captain Benjamin Brooke (1753-1834), Revolutionary officer, operator of Gulph Mills Forge and member of State Legislature in 1798, whose own house (now called Elderbrook) to the east of Bel Orme was erected just after the Revolution. We know that Bel Orme, a smaller and simpler house, stood before the death of Nathan Brooke in 1815 on the 106 acres which his father, the Captain, deeded to him on April 1, 1806 (Delaware County Deed Book K, p. 487); Nathan's widow Mary (d. 1853) succeeded him; his sons Mark Brooke (1807-1878) and Benjamin Brooke (d. 1850) were in joint possession of Bel Orme in 1848 (Joshua W. Ash, Map of Delaware County, Pa./Philadelphia:1848/ and again in 1877 (G. M. Hopkins, Atlas of Philadelphia and Environs/Philadelphia:1877/), at which time it was included with a larger and later adjoining farmhouse, corner of County Line and Gulph Creek Roads (the actual residence of Mark Brooke). Both were sold in the 1880's to Walter L. C. Biddle by Mark Brooke's children; Thomas Mott, son of Quaker suffragist Lucretia Mott acquired the joint property in 1889 (Delaware County Deed Book Z-6, pp. 223, 227, 297, 300), which last recites the history of the property from 1806. Thomas Mott tore down the larger Mark Brooke residence to erect "Pelham," designed and built by his son-in-law, architect George B. Shaw of Boston. Mott's tenant farmer occupied Bel Orme, which was given English half-timbered characteristics to harmonize with the larger house. Mark Brooke and Thomas Mott and the larger house are mentioned on p. 226 of Rev. S. F. Hotchkin's Rural Pennsylvania (Philadelphia:1897).

- C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: None known

Prepared by F. J. Dallett Date June 1958
For Radnor Historical Society

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: No information

2. Condition of fabric: The building is in excellent condition and is well maintained by its architect-owner.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Seventy-four feet (74') by sixty-one feet (61').
2. Foundations: Stone
3. Wall construction: Stone, eighteen inches thick
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads etc.: Shed roof over entrance (north facade - see photograph)
5. Chimneys: Four, of stone. One in present first floor hall, facing living-room door, is original; one other is partly original.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Doors are modern, panelled wood.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Small pane, double-hung sash windows, a few old with fine muntins and old glass. Shutters outside throughout house, probably all replacements.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Wood shingles and shingle lath. Adzed and pegged rafters remain in old section. Light ridgepole.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Modern (1917). Flat crown mold, fascia and soffit.
 - c. Dormers: None

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans: Originally Bel Orme was an L-shaped stone building of two stories divided into three rooms (two in the long arm of L). The entrance faced south. Fireplaces were on the north and west walls. There was probably an enclosed stairway on the south wall. The old house was extended with two wings (1917). First Floor: wide T-shaped hallway opening from front door. Six main rooms (including service), not including entry with coat room and lavatory. Second floor: hallway and seven main rooms, not including four lavatories.

2. Stairways: Two, both dating from 1917
3. Flooring: Remnants of old wide pine boards in first and second floor hallway (second is best).
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plain plastered walls, painted and/or papered. Two second floor bedrooms on south wall both have original joists.
5. Doorways and doors: Simple wooden panelled doors, "Colonial" reproductions. Mantels are either "Colonial" reproductions or carved by hand with designs of the flora of Bel Orme by Lester H. Sellers.
6. Trim: Simple, "Colonial" style
7. Hardware: Modern
8. Lighting: Electricity
9. Heating: Coal heat. Seven fireplaces all in use.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: In valley ("Cream Valley") between two high hills. Gulph Creek from Schuylkill River runs through property on northern edge. Front door faces north.
2. Enclosures: Raised terrace with stone walls (modern), covered stone shed and brick-paved courtyard within a stone wall enclose the house.
3. Outbuildings: Studio of architect-owner Lester H. Sellers, which incorporates the original stone spring house. Cow Barn of stone built 1900.
4. Walks: Old brick walk from house to Cow Barn; miscellaneous brick and flagstone paths.
5. Landscaping: Lawns, meadows of daisies, huge elms and other trees, vegetable gardens.

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